

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 896

By McKenzie

A RESOLUTION to recognize and congratulate the Austin-East High School boys' soccer team, TSSAA Division I, Class A State champions.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly are pleased to specially honor and commend those successful young athletes who, through their magnificent exploits, bring honor to Tennessee and serve as exceptional ambassadors of this State; and

WHEREAS, such estimable young Tennesseans are the members of the Austin-East High School boys' soccer team, who won the TSSAA Division I, Class A State championship on May 28, 2021, in Murfreesboro at the Richard Siegel Soccer Complex; and

WHEREAS, the Austin-East Roadrunners claimed the school's first-ever soccer state championship amid a year beset with tragedy and grief, compounded by the attendant stressors and hardships of a global pandemic; and

WHEREAS, after the 2020 season was canceled due to Covid-19, Head Coach Jon Netherland and Assistant Coach Malaika Guthrie were ready to guide their team with positive energy and steady leadership, even in the face of recent tragedy at the high school; and

WHEREAS, during the first four months of 2021, students at Austin-East High School were left to grapple with a series of deaths of classmates and former classmates from gun violence; four of these deaths, including that of a former soccer player, occurred from late January through early March, and in April of 2021, a fatal shooting took place inside the school building; and

WHEREAS, weighted with the grief of relentless tragedy, the Austin-East High School boys' soccer team nevertheless persevered, exhibiting exceptional skill on the soccer field and bringing much-needed joy and pride to their community; and

WHEREAS, one of the team's most advantageous attributes is its diversity; of the twenty-five players on the 2021 team, the majority were refugees, representing six countries; team standout Cheikhna "Sadibou" Seck hails from Dakar, Senegal; and

WHEREAS, the team is also fortunate to be ably led by Coach Netherland, who has served as head coach since 2016 and stewarded the school's soccer program from its unremarkable, fledgling days to its current championship glory; and

WHEREAS, at the beginning of the 2021 season, the Roadrunners were quick out of the gate, winning three of their first four games behind the goal scoring of Sadibou Seck and Lavie Ushindi, and the defense of Marius Irankunda and Team Captain Esloni Hakizimana; and

WHEREAS, throughout the season, Austin-East frequently faced rival Gatlinburg-Pittman High School, with Gatlinburg-Pittman claiming the regular-season crown, and the Roadrunners winning the district title and the regional title, the latter with a 1-0 victory on a free kick by Sadibou Seck; and

WHEREAS, in State tournament play, the Roadrunners cruised to an 8-0 win in the quarterfinal against Gibson County and clinched a tense 1-0 victory over Merrol Hyde in the semifinal, with Sadibou Seck scoring the game-winning goal; and

WHEREAS, in the State title game, Austin-East High School once again faced off against Gatlinburg-Pittman High School; the epic match saw multiple lead changes and shifts in momentum, and then, after Gatlinburg-Pittman took the lead in overtime, the Roadrunners rallied, winning 5-4 after Sadibou Seck once again came through with a game-winning penalty kick; and

WHEREAS, the Austin-East boys' soccer team returned to a hero's welcome in Knoxville, complete with a police escort and more than 200 jubilant supporters waiting at the high school campus; the celebration continued in the days and weeks to follow, as the young

men were duly commended for their athletic prowess and for bringing joy to their school and community after such heartbreaking adversity; and

WHEREAS, the Austin-East High School boys' soccer team displayed uncommon talent, determination, and perseverance in its quest for athletic excellence, and it is wholly fitting that the members of the team should be commended; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we congratulate the members and coaches of the Austin-East High School boys' soccer team on winning the TSSAA Division I, Class A State championship and extend to them our best wishes for continued success in all their future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.